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ABSTRACT

The similarity between supervisors and subordinates has been shown to influence the attitudes and behavior of both. This study examines three perspectives of similarity: (1) accuracy of perceived instrumentalities; (2) actual and perceived personal similarity of background perspective; and (3) person-environment fit. These perspectives were examined for their influence on employee satisfaction and performance, and supervisor decisions about employee merit pay awards. Subjects included 155 dyads of subordinates and supervisors who were health care support personnel. Accuracy was measured by supervisors and subordinates rating the degree to which 10 areas of employee behavior were related to a high performance rating. Person-environment fit was measured comparing the responses. The results suggest that the most influential effect on performance was perceived likeness. Perceived similarity was related to higher satisfaction and performance ratings. Perceived similarity may reflect a motivational factor in which subordinates imitate the supervisor as a role model. (ABL)

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Influences of Leader-Subordinate Similarity on Performance and Pay Decisions

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Influences of Leader-Subordinate Similarity on Performance and Pay Decisions

Abstract

Similarity among subordinate-supervisor dyads has been related to supervisor ratings of employee performance and to employee satisfaction in several studies. The present study investigated relationships among three different types of similarity: (a) accuracy of perceived instrumentalities; (b) actual and perceived personal similarity; and (c) a person-environment fit model. Measures of each were related to employee satisfaction, and supervisor ratings of employee merit pay awards and employee performance for health care support personnel (N=155 dyads). The results indicated that perceived and actual similarity accounted for the majority of the variance in the criteria.

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Influences of Leader-subordinate Similarity on Performance and Pay Decisions

The amount of congruence or similarity among supervisor-subordinate dyads has been shown to be an important influence on the attitudes and behaviors of both members of the dyad (Greene, 1972; Hatfield & Huseman, 1982). Previous studies have measured similarity in a number of ways and from a variety of perspectives. The present study examines three of these perspectives and compares the degree to which each helps to explain influences on employee satisfaction, supervisor ratings of employee performance, and supervisor decisions about employee merit pay awards. The three models or perspectives examined were: (a) accuracy of perceived instrumentalities; (b) actual and perceived personal similarity of background perspective; and (c) a person-environment fit model.

Accuracy. Previous studies have found that a subordinate is likely to receive a higher performance rating when the subordinate and supervisor have similar expectations about job demands (Greene, 1972; Greene & Organ, 1973). These studies are consistent with a number of leadership and motivational models which suggest that the clearer the subordinate's understanding of the behaviors valued by the leader, the better able the subordinate is to channel effort into areas that will enhance job performance. Thus, one might expect that greater agreement between supervisor and subordinate on the instrumentality ratings of various job related behaviors will result in greater role clarity and higher ratings of subordinate performance.

Similarity. A second model has focussed on the degree of actual and perceived similarity between the employee and the supervisor. Wexley and his associates (1980, 1983) found that the subordinate's awareness of the

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supervisor's attitudes influenced both satisfaction with the supervisor and ratings of the supervisor's performance. The manager's awareness of subordinate attitudes exerted a similar influence on ratings of subordinate performance. Pulakos and Wexley (1983) found that perceived similarity was also important. Both supervisors and subordinates evaluated their counterparts differently when they were perceived as similar rather than dissimilar. Thus, one might assume that even when the supervisor and subordinate agree on the importance of job related behaviors, the degree of mutually perceived similarity will still exert a significant influence of performance and satisfaction. Similarly, one might expect that when the supervisor and subordinate are from similar demographic backgrounds, both perceived similarity and accuracy will be greater.

Person-environment fit. A final element in the study of congruence is the idea that the subordinate will perform better and will be more satisfied when the supervisor stresses behaviors that are valued by the subordinate. Thus, it might be expected that agreement in such areas will be enhanced when the similarity is greater between supervisor and subordinate.

Each of the above models has received empirical support, but little evidence exists to compare the effects of such influences or to understand the interrelationships among them. The present study was an attempt to provide such evidence.

Method

Subjects

The sample consisted of health care support personnel employed by a rehabilitative center located in a large southwestern city. A total of

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155 subordinates and 30 supervisors provided the 155 dyads that were analyzed. The majority of the sample were employed as nurses (subordinates N=81, 52%; supervisors N=16, 53%) with the remainder in clinical services, such as physical and occupational therapy (subordinates N=56, 36%; supervisors N=12, 40%), or clerical services (subordinates N=22, 14%; supervisors N=2, 7%). The median age was 33.5 years for subordinates, 34.5 for supervisors. The median tenure was 41 months for subordinates, 90 months for supervisors. The median education level for subordinates was a high school degree and a college degree for supervisors. The subordinates were 53% black (N=82), 36% white (N=56), and 7% Hispanic (N=10), whereas the supervisors were 17% black (N=5), 75% white (N=22), 8% Hispanic (N=3).

Instruments

Accuracy was measured by asking both supervisors and subordinates to rate the degree to which 10 areas of employee behavior were important to attain a high performance rating. Employee-Supervisor discrepancy scores were then computed as a D^2 index and summed. Similarly, person-environment fit was scored by asking subordinates what should be emphasized and comparing the responses to supervisor responses about the areas that were important. Actual similarity was measured in terms of differences in education, tenure and race. All the above scores were created so that a higher score reflected lower levels of similarity. Perceived similarity was measured by asking the supervisor and employees to rate each other to which they felt the other was similar to them in terms of background, perspective values and work habits. Thus a higher score indicated greater similarity. Finally, role ambiguity and role conflict were measured (House & Rizzo, 1972). Supervisors provided overall performance ratings and recommended merit pay percentages for each subordinate.

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Results and Discussion

Correlations among the different measures of similarity and their relationships with the various criterion measures are shown in Table 1. In general, these data support the patterns predicted earlier. Perceived similarity was related to higher satisfaction and to higher ratings of performance. Further, there was a tendency toward mutually shared views of similarity. Demographic similarity was unrelated to perceived similarity, but did seem to influence performance ratings as expected. Somewhat unexpected, however, was the negative relationship with satisfaction, suggesting that these employees found it more pleasant to work for a dissimilar supervisor. Finally, the person-environment fit measure showed no relationship with the criteria and was dropped from further analysis.

Insert Tables 1 & 2 about here

Correlations with role conflict and role ambiguity (not shown) also supported the hypothesized patterns. Subordinate rated similarity was correlated with both role conflict ($r = -.34$, $p < .05$) and role ambiguity ($r = -.65$, $p < .05$). Corresponding relationships for supervisor rated similarity were -.17 and -.26, respectively (both $p < .05$). Such relationships and the negative correlation between instrumental discrepancy and perceived similarity indeed support the argument that similarity provides greater insight into the expected demands of the job.

Hierarchical regression analyses (see Table 2) were also performed to provide further information about possible overlap among the influences of the different indices of similarity. These analyses suggested that perceived and

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actual similarity indices represent somewhat different sources of influence, but that accuracy measures provided little additional information once similarity was considered.

Based on such results, one must ask what factors lead to perceived similarity. The above results suggest that similarity of instrumentality perceptions may influence rated personal similarity rather than the opposite direction postulated earlier.

In an attempt to further understand the factors that lead to perceived similarity, these measures were also correlated with scores on a number of subordinate personality variables. Such measures included Rosenberg's (1965) measure of self-esteem, the Buckholz (1978) measures of Humanistic Ethic (a measure of growth needs) Liesure Ethic, and Protestant Ethic, and a measure of Need for Achievement adapted from Steers and Porter (1979).

The supervisor rating of similarity showed a low but significant relationship with the measures of self-esteem ($r = .17$) and Humanistic Ethic ($r = .17$). Subordinate ratings of similarity were also positively related to self-esteem ($r = .21$) and negatively associated with Liesure Ethic scores ($r = -.19$). These data suggest that perceived similarity may reflect in part a motivational elemenet where upwardly oriented subordinates adopt the supervisor as a role model to be imitated and where behaviors associated with positive work attitudes provide cues to the supervisor about possible similarities with the subordinate.

In sum, the present study suggests that even though the different indices of employee-supervisor similarity represent somewhat different areas of influence on performance and satisfaction scores, the most influential is the mutually perceived likeness. This score seems to reflect certain personality

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patterns of value to the supervisor as well as greater clarity of role demands. Further information is needed, however, about the mechanisms through which such increased clarity is achieved.

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Table 1

Correlation Matrix of Supervisor-Employee Congruence Measures with Job-Related Criterion

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Subordinate similarity to supervisor								
2. Supervisor similarity to subordinate	.34**							
3. Demographic similarity	.07	-.03						
4. Discrepancy of instrumentalities	-.18*	-.15	-.11					
5. Person-environment fit	.04	.00	.11	-.19*				
6. Subordinate job satisfaction	.30**	.15	-.19*	-.16*	-.01			
7. Supervisor rating of subordinate performance	.19*	.37**	.19*	-.15	.09	.06		
8. Supervisor rating of subordinate pay raise	.19*	.31**	.12	-.15	.11	.10	.67**	

N = 155 dyads

* p .05

** p .01

Table 2

Hierarchical Comparison of Congruence Measures

Predictor Sets	# of Predictors	Criterion Measures: Job Satisfaction Multiple R	Job Satisfaction Shrunken R^2	Rated Performance Multiple R	Rated Performance Shrunken R^2	Rated Merit Pay Raise Multiple R	Rated Merit Pay Raise Shrunken R^2
Rated perceived similarity	2	.300**	.078**	.376**	.130**	.324**	.105**
Actual similarity	1	.195*	.032*	.189*	.029*	.117	.007
Total similarity	3	.369**[a]	.119**	.423**[a]	.162**	.340**	.101**
Discrepancy	1	.180*	.026*	.164*	.021*	.104	.004
Total similarity + discrepancy	4	.394**	.133**	.431**	.164**	.346**	.096**

*p .05

**p .01

[a] R^2 change is significant at p .01

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